

**Assessment Task 2: Complete and analyse a short e-learning course.**

In this paper I will evaluate and critically reflect the effectiveness of a significant learning experience which was conducted online. Firstly, I'll explain why I chose to undertake the online course and the outcomes that I set myself to achieve. Secondly, the course chosen will be critiqued from the perspectives of pedagogy. Finally, the course and my learning experience will be reflected upon to identify any recommendations that may be implemented to improve the course in the future.

E-learning with today's technology is a convenient and flexible way for humans in today's society to learn anywhere at any time on the planet. Participating in a free online course was a new experience for me as this was the first time I had attempted to participate in a course where there wasn't a lecturer or teacher in front of the class.

Before initially enrolling in the free course I had chosen, I arrived at a conclusion that whatever I was going to learn needed to relate to the real world so I could use what I learnt in the future. Merrill (2002) implies that for a course to be deemed effective, the knowledge gained needs to be utilised and integrate as part of one's life upon course completion.

As a student undertaking a Bachelor of Education at UTS for the past two years and an educator at TAFE NSW, there has been one thing made apparent with learning. To gain learners interests they require being motivated. Merrill (2008) states in his video on instructional design, that no matter how something is delivered, real learning needs to be related to a real life problems or tasks. In applying this theory to my decision in selecting this course, it provided motivation and a desire throughout my e-learning experience to successfully complete the digital photography course and its objectives.

The course objectives that I set myself to master were to gain an understanding of the basic elements of photography and the different techniques and functions of a camera that can be applied in different environments.

The course was logically sequenced and consisted of numerous modules which incorporated a series of topics. The setup of course allowed the users to be in full control in regards to when and where you wanted to start a module or topic. Navigating the course content was found to be relative easy and progress could be monitored effectively throughout the course. Merrill (2008) states that many e-learning courses are information dump sites. The digital

photography course did not resemble this at all, as it consisted of a high amount of video/audio and various links to literature with examples of different photos.

One might suggest the course would better suit those learners with a visual, aural, read/write learning style (Fleming 2010). As a kinaesthetic learner, throughout the course I took notes of what was being explained so I could practice the task at hand with my own camera. Merrill (2008) argues for learning to be successful we need to show the learner what needs to be learnt and give the learner adequate time to be involved and practice what they're trying to learn. This method reinforces what's being learnt by successfully completing the task at hand by trial and error and not just relying on what we read or are being told. The estimated course duration was three hours and took me over four hours. It could be argued though, how can there be an estimate duration figure, when everyone absorbs information in different ways and speeds due to our different learning styles?

As the learner in this online digital photography course, I found the course to be very informative and user friendly, though the course was lacking interaction with other learners. Cashion and Palmieri (2002) suggest that problems with technology and learner support are barriers to the effectiveness of e-learning. There had been an online forum created for learners undertaking this course however, the forum wasn't been utilised. To overcome this problem I interacted with a fellow colleague who was undertaking the same course at the same time. This made me feel as I wasn't alone attempting something new for the first time. Roper (2007) further highlights that online connections also promote a sense of being a learner among other learners.

Communication was completed via a NING platform to discuss key aspects and any problems that may arise whilst undertaking the course. Working as a group provided a sense of security and inclusiveness which involved us in a process of collective learning also known as a community of practice. Wenger cited in Smith (2009) notes that 'communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'.

On completion of all course modules, a summative assessment was completed to assess what was learnt and retained, to reflect my understanding from the course. I would strongly recommend that the course may need to consider incorporating interactivity in the form of formative assessments at the end of each module. This would gauge the level and absorption of learning, keep the learner engaged and eliminate the learner fast forwarding through the

course. To further that, another down side to the whole e-learning course area is that there is little opportunity to received constructive feedback on what could be improved throughout the learners experience whilst learning.

In conclusion, completing the online course and the above analysis together has allowed me to gain an insight of the three key aspects that contribute to the effectiveness of an e-learning course. Firstly, the need to identify the correct pedagogy for the course and the learning styles they may suit. Chizmar & Williams cited in Cashion & Palmieri (2000) note that pedagogy must drive our choices in delivering and setting up instructional technology, not the opposite. It has become apparent that courses set up with minimal insights to pedagogical aspects can have detrimental effects on ones learning. To further this how can one specific course delivered online suit all leaning styles? Secondly, interactivity needs to be included in the setup of the course. This will allow interaction with other learners to share experiences and collaborate on technical issues. Finally, implementing formative assessments at the end of each stage/topic would gauge ones learning and allow the learner to receive feedback, before further course progression. This and the points above would all contribute to an effective e-learning experience.

A question to be asked is, do all courses look at the delivery process like stated above, or take a generic pedagogical perspective and a one-size fits all approach?

1105 words

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